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# The Washington Post

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May 30, 1986

The Honorable  
William E. Casey  
Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Bill:

You said on the telephone to me the other day that you didn't want to get into a "pissing match."

Later that day, in an interview with the AP, you repeated part of your speech of May 15 in which you suggest that we were responsible for the death of an American because we wrote a story about the rescinding of a CIA counterterrorist program after the unauthorized bombing in a Beirut suburb where 80 persons were killed on March 8.

If this is the way you choose to avoid a pissing match, let me say that you are seriously mistaken. Your premise is that The Washington Post, first and alone, described some kind of connection between the bombing on March 8 and the United States.

That is simply wrong.

Can I remind you that on the day following that bombing -- that is, on March 9 -- more than two months before the Washington Post story, a large poster, more than 20 feet in length, was hung on the second floor of the ruins of the bombed-out building. That sign said "Made in USA." It hung there before hundreds of thousands of Arab eyes in the Beirut suburb for a long time.

Our story specifically said that the Lebanese counterterrorist unit which executed this bombing was acting "without CIA authorization." The banner headline called the bombing "Unauthorized." "...without CIA authorization" appeared in the second paragraph of the story.

I must tell you that I think that in view of all of this, you are acting most irresponsibly in suggesting that Woodward and The Post had anything to do with anyone's death.

For your information, I am enclosing the memorandum which I asked Bob Woodward to prepare in answer to your speech and in answer to the interview you gave yesterday to the AP.

Sincerely,



Encl.

DATE-TIME: 05/30/1986 - 16:52 COPY 01 OF 01 TO CASEY

%May 23, 1986.

%To Ben Bradlee and Len Downie:

%From Bob Woodward.

%Casey's speech May 15 to The American Jewish Committee, pages 10 to 13 in the text, referring to our story of May 12, 1985 (Anti-terrorist Plan Rescinded After Unauthorized Bombing) fundamentally misstates what we reported and how we handled the story.

%His position in the speech boiled down seems to be simple: that some well-known reporter (me) called up the CIA, had wrong information, was set straight and ran a story anyway, thus risking lives and perhaps causing the TWA hi-jacking last June. That's a serious charge and ought to be answered.

%This is the chronology:

%April 10, 1985---After a background interview at the CIA with Robert Gates, I gave a copy of a preliminary draft of a proposed story to CIA spokesman George Lauder. The story said that President Reagan had authorized creation of a counter-terrorist team to conduct covert pre-emptive strikes against terrorists planning to attack U.S. facilities in the Middle East. Lauder said he was not aware of any such operation but would check. I was not aware at that point that the operation had been canceled.

%Apr. 11, 1985. Lauder told me that the operation had been "overtaken by events." He declined to explain how or why. I continued reporting and found a senior Lebanese intelligence colonel who was in Washington at a CIA management course. This man said that his service had done the bombing of the headquarters of Fadlallah in Beirut on March 8 when about 80 people were killed; this man claimed that the CIA was not involved but knew about it in advance.

%May 3, 1985. In a background interview with CIA deputy director John McMahon, I asked about the counter-terrorist operation and why Lauder (who was at the interview) had said it was "overtaken by events." McMahon said, off the  
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incidents; that the Lebanese had gone and done the radicalian bombing; so it would not be proper for the CIA to be a part of that kind of counter-terrorism and thus the operation was cancelled.

Meanwhile, Chuck Babcock and I had made inquiries about the operation to a range of sources. Six sources confirmed the operation and the cancellation of the counter-terrorist operation because of the March 8 Fadlallah bombing. Because McMahon's answer was off the record, we wanted to make sure that we had fully independent sourcing.

May 10, 1985. I notified Lauder that we would be running a story on this in two days; the two of us agreed to talk Saturday, May 11, and probably get together in person to review the final draft. Lauder was not happy but said that he knew that some day something would be run.

May 11, 1985. Lauder and I had three conversations. I enclose a copy of my letter to Lauder of June 25, 1985. Lauder had initially agreed to meet me at my house at 3:30 p.m. that day to go over the story, but Lauder changed his mind and declined. In the final conversation of that day, I read him the top portion of the story and he said, unhappily, "You have the facts."

May 12, 1985 the story ran, carefully stating that the bombing was "unauthorized," that it was a "runaway mission," that the Lebanese had hired others to carry out the bombing and that the CIA personnel had no contact with those who actually carried out the bombing.

May 13, 1985 The New York Times, an institution not necessarily reluctant to dispute our reporting, confirmed the story in its essential details, "Lebanese Group Linked to CIA Is Tied to Car Bombing Fatal to 30." The Los Angeles Times, Newsweek, Time, The Wall Street Journal and the three major television networks followed with stories confirming the essential details in one way or another (The Los Angeles Times made the point that the Congressional intelligence committees believed the CIA could not be charged with "responsibility" for the March 8 bombing---a point I think could have been made explicit, rather than just implicit in our original story.)

The Wall Street Journal story June 10, 1985 probably best summarizes what happened: "Reluctantly, the agency (CIA) last December endorsed a new

"The plan proved a disaster. The Lebanese spy service, like the rest of the country, had largely disintegrated by early this year. Some of its members decided to undertake a preemptive operation of their own in a car bomb attack March 8 against Shiite religious leader Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah in a Beirut suburb. The bomb missed Sheik Fadlallah but killed about 80 others. The CIA insists it didn't have any involvement in the operation and didn't train those who carried it out. But in the uproar that followed the bombing, the agency retreated from the plan to train Arabs for preemptive operations."

"May 22, 1985. Casey called me saying he had heard from another reporter that I was claiming he had confirmed the story. He had not confirmed it. In two discussions I had with him in the weeks before the story, I had asked him about it and he refused to comment in any form. His objection in this call was not so much to the story but the way other news organizations were handling it. "It's the way it got picked up," he said. He did add that I could wind up with blood on my hands.

"June 21, 1985. Lauder wrote a letter to the Post that was published. He made much of the fact that the House Intelligence Committee had said that "no U.S. Government complicity, direct or indirect, can be established with respect to the March 8 bombing in Beirut." The House committee issued that statement because of a proposed resolution calling for an investigation to determine if the CIA "knew about beforehand, or was in some way responsible for" the March 8 incident--two issues that we had addressed extensively in our original story and generally answered in a way that took the CIA off the hook.

"The CIA, Lauder and now Casey seem to want to define our original story as the fourth paragraph--or their misreading of it--as the crucial element. The paragraph said: "Faced with an indirect connection to the car bombing, alarmed CIA and Reagan administration officials quickly canceled the entire covert support operation..." In retrospect, we might better have said that faced with a runaway Lebanese intelligence service, the CIA canceled the operation. Surely, however, there was an "indirect connection," one made clear by the subsequent

Casey said in his speech that the relation with the Lebanese was the CIA's "long-term practice of providing training and technical assistance to the security services of other countries." But everyone, including Lauder and Senator Moynihan on the record in the New York Times May 13, 1985 story said there was a new authority or finding at the end of 1984, which authorized for the first time CIA support for that kind of pre-emptive counter-terrorist action.

Casey also said in his speech that, "We at the CIA either did not have time or were not fast enough in bringing the matter to the attention of management at the newspaper."

I don't understand this because for a period of one month I was talking with Lauder and had raised the matter directly with Casey on two occasions. As you both may recall, you were kept informed of this story as it developed almost step by step.

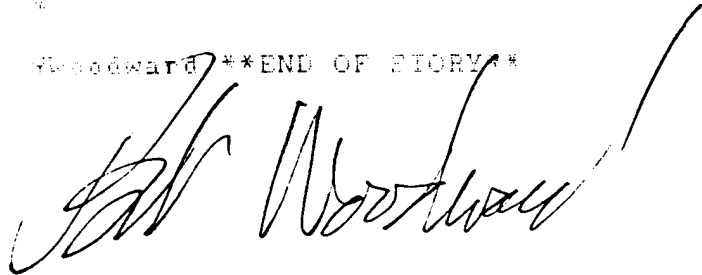
Casey himself confirmed the essential details in an interview in the June 17, 1985 issue of U.S. News & World Report. Asked about the March 8 bombing in Beirut, he said, "Well, we didn't like the way that situation was handled. So we pulled back from any involvement in the planning or preparation of operations."

He added, "If someone gets killed or hurt, well, it's a rough game."

He ought to be answered.

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Woodward \*\*END OF STORY\*\*

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Bob Woodward". The signature is written over the typed name "Woodward" and extends across the page.

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led to express the rationale  
administration policy.

addressing an audience at Yeshi-  
university, Shultz said: "The  
ad upholds the universal law of  
defense, saying, 'If one comes  
at you, make haste and kill him

Clearly, as long as threats  
law-abiding nations have the  
and indeed the duty to protect  
selves."

According to the sources, Reagan  
gave the covert "finding" au-  
thorizing CIA training and support  
of antiterrorist units in Lebanon  
before Shultz gave the speech  
in December.

## Mock-Up of Embassy Seen

Two sources said that the Sept.  
terrorist bombing of the U.S.  
embassy annex in Beirut last year  
did persuade officials that they  
should develop some means of pre-  
venting planned terrorist attacks.  
In the fact, officials learned that  
intelligence agencies had over-  
satellite photographs of what  
ought to be the van used in the  
embassy bombing.

These photos showed the vehicle  
to be a mock-up of the embassy  
that the terrorists were us-  
ing for a practice run, sources said.  
Although the connection was estab-  
lished after the fact, the sources  
said that, in the future, this kind of  
intelligence might be part of the  
plan for a preemptive attack.

A source argued that the de-  
cision to use a covert team



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Apartment house in Beirut suburb after March 8 car-bombing in runaway mission. Blast killed more than 80 persons.

amounted to recreating for the CIA  
a role it played in its early years,  
before the Watergate scandal and  
subsequent congressional investi-  
gations of the agency dampened its  
ardor for clandestine operations.

Accordingly, this source said,  
Reagan's decision to authorize the  
covert team was "the final curtain  
on the legacy of both Vietnam and  
Watergate." Of all the Reagan ad-  
ministration's decisions on national  
security, this source said, "It was  
the most tricky, the most contro-  
versial and sensitive . . . [It] took  
the most goading to get change."

But when the operation went  
astray after the Lebanese went  
ahead with an unapproved car-  
bombing, officials involved in the  
plan felt they had no alternative to

canceling U.S. support for the an-  
titerrorist squads.

One official who favored creation  
of the units said: "If you take ter-  
rorism seriously, as we must,  
you've got to realize that it could  
get worse . . . If we had informa-

tion on some terrorists involved in  
nuclear detonation practice, you've  
got to act. No choice. That is the  
type of issue we are going to have  
to face, and we better be ready."

Staff researcher Barbara Feinman  
contributed to this report.

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# DOWN JUST 1985!\*

